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Making Health Information Make Sense

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[NO COMMENTS]

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As health professionals, our job is to take clinical and technical information and make it personal to the individual or group with whom we are speaking.

As health information disseminators, we’ve studied the science, analyzed the data, and trained in our area of expertise. We draw on that detailed knowledge and vast experience in order to provide high quality care and guidance to our patients.

But how many of us go a step beyond providing our expert advice and consider how we provide that health information, or who we are providing it to? If we don’t take into account the patient’s understanding or familiarity with specific language, terms, and concepts, then the quality of our care might not be as impactful.

As health professionals, our job is to take clinical and technical information and make it personal to the individual or group with whom we are speaking. This is why at the Health Promotion and Wellness Department of the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center

Navy Medicine Video

Navy Medicine is a global healthcare network of 63,000 Navy medical personnel around the world who provide high quality health care to more than one million eligible beneficiaries. Navy Medicine personnel deploy with Sailors and Marines worldwide, providing critical mission support aboard ship, in the air, under the sea and on the battlefield.

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People with accurate knowledge about the body and disease will have a better understanding of the relationship between lifestyle choices and their health.

(NMCPHC), we take action supporting health education within the military community by promoting health literacy.

The Facts

As you know, health literacy is the ability to find and understand health information and services– and then be able to use that information to make decisions about one’s health and medical care. People with accurate knowledge about the body and disease will have a better understanding of the relationship between lifestyle choices and their health, such as the impact of exercise and nutrition on overall health and wellness.

Low health literacy can actually harm a patient’s health. According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, it can affect one’s ability to:

- Fill out complicated forms
- Share personal information like health history
- Get important or required screening tests
- Manage a chronic disease, illness, or injury
- Understand how to take medicines
- Take care of themselves in general



The National Assessment of Adult Literacy reports that only 11

Unfortunately, many service members have challenges with health literacy. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy reports that only 11 percent1 of service members and adult beneficiaries have proficient health literacy skills. While this statistic is comparable to the U.S. adult civilian population (12

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percent1 of service members and adult beneficiaries have proficient health literacy skills

percent1), it is no less alarming. Fortunately, as health information

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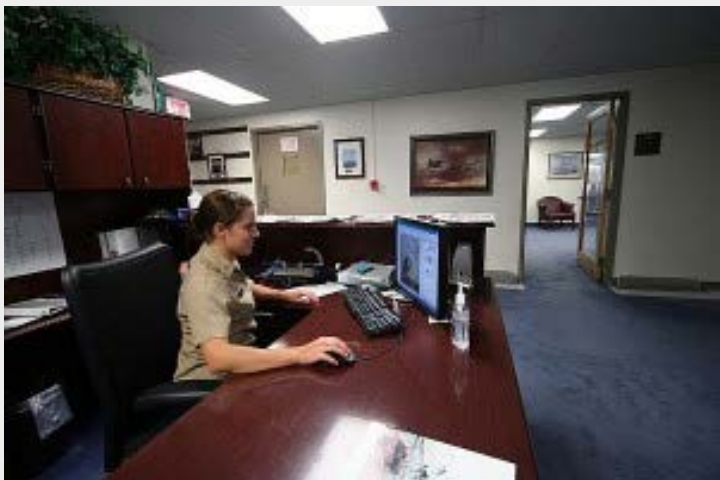
disseminators you are in a position to make a difference.

How You Can Make a Difference

Your patients need information they can understand and use to adopt healthy behaviors and make educated decisions about their health. Often health information is written at a high school or higher reading level and not easily understood by all service members and their families. By using plain language and asking questions to ensure that your patient understands the information or instructions, you can provide better care and enhance their health. To learn more, check out our Easy Ways to Improve Patients' Health Literacy factsheet.

Like most Americans, when Sailors and Marines have questions about their health or treatment options for a diagnosed condition, they go online to search for information. While the Internet can be a quick and easy resource for the latest news and reports, it can provide a wealth of misinformation as well. In order to help your patients evaluate the authenticity of the websites they are searching, we developed a factsheet that will help them separate fact from fiction. Be sure to download Cut Through the Clutter: Find Health Info on the Web and share it with your patients today.

Let's face it, discussing certain health concerns can be awkward or even a little embarrassing. When an illness or injury strikes, Sailors and Marines often "suck it up" and avoid seeking treatment. As health information disseminators, you can ease your patients' discomfort by



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encouraging them to seek care and providing them with the Four Tips on Talking to Your Doctor for Better Health.

Our goal at NMCPHC is to assist you in helping Sailors and Marines in your care understand information and instructions about their diagnosis, treatment plan, medications, and follow-up actions, which enables them to get the most out of their health care to make the best decisions for them and their family. For more information and resources on health literacy, visit our Health Promotion toolbox.

[1] U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. America's Health Literacy: Why We Need Accessible Health Information. <http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy/issuebrief/>. Published 2008. Accessed

September 12, 2014.

[1] U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health. *MedlinePlus Health Literacy*. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthliteracy.html>. Published April 30, 2014. Accessed September 16, 2014.

[1] Rudd, R, Moeykens, B, and Colton, T. Health and literacy: A review of the medical and public health literature. *Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*. New York: Jossey-Bass. 1999; 1 (5).

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